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Dr. Elaine Gallin, Director
Office of International Health Studies
Department of Energy
270 Corporate Center
20300 Century Blvd.
Germantown, MD 20874

Dear Dr. Gallin:

I am interested in learning the status of various health studies sponsored by the Department of Energy which focus on the health consequences of the 1986 nuclear disaster at Chernobyl. At an April 23 hearing before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, testimony was presented by the Ambassadors of Ukraine and Belarus, as well as two experts, who expressed grave concerns about the long-term impact of the disaster on the population of the region.

Particular concern was expressed about three high-risk population groups: 1) the so-called "liquidators," or veterans of the nuclear cleanup at the Chernobyl site; 2) the families which were evacuated out of the 30-kilometer "Exclusion Zone" or other heavily contaminated areas; and 3) women, children and newborns who continue to reside in the areas where they might be exposed through the consumption of food to "low levels" of radiation on a continual or cumulative basis.


Please inform me of the U.S.-funded research focused on these groups. How is progress on these studies? Beyond reliance on Ukrainian and Belarusian government registries, what original data is being gathered?

Ten years after the explosion, studies indicate that chromosome damage among children in Belarus and Ukraine has been quite extensive. At the Commission hearing, one witness testified about the in-depth study by a team from the University of Hiroshima in Japan which indicates that birth defects and stillbirths have nearly doubled in Belarus. Similar increases have been reported in northern Ukraine. Recent demographic trends identified by the United Nations and local health ministries show that infant mortality and mortality in the general population of both nations are on the rise. Increasingly, the number of live births is exceeded by the total deaths in the population. Does current U.S. Government research focus on these trends? What is the scope of research regarding these trends?

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Finally, it is my understanding that the international scientific community was caught off-guard by the high incidence of thyroid cancer among children exposed to radiation from the Chornobyl explosion. Based on testimony at the Commission hearing, I am concerned that other types of cancers and other life-threatening health effects could be accelerating and passing unnoticed by Western researchers. Has your office directed studies regarding such health effects? What are the conclusions of the studies?

I will be most appreciative of information which you provide on these matters, and I look forward to your reply. Should you have any questions regarding the various points which I have raised, please contact Orest Deychak at 202-225-1901.

Sincerely,

CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
Chairman

CHS/osd